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The Black Cat

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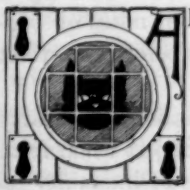
The Man with the Lucky Eye.

BY JOHN W. HARDING.



ALL Naples was amusing itself. The tide of gaiety rising throughout the holiday week had reached high-water mark; and to-night, on Christmas Eve, four hundred thousand Neapolitans and five Americans were abroad bent on the pursuit of pleasure. Or if this proportion of Americans is not exact, it is with the doings of these five only, and more especially one of the five, that this narrative concerns itself.

Prof. Rufus Poppleton was that one. The other four were the Hon. Thomas Whipple, solid and sedate; Mrs. Whipple, portly and self-possessed; Miss Whipple, newly "out" and impartially enthusiastic; and Miss Alicia Folsom, aged twenty-three, with an open record of Washington social successes and a secret ambition to study art in the atmosphere of foreign capitals. Trips abroad are, however, not reckoned among the necessities of the daughters of government petty officials, and this unexpected six months spent in Europe as the guest of the Whipples had added to Miss Folsom's charm a dangerous sparkle and expansion that may account for the degree of Professor Poppleton's abandon to the gaiety of the hour. Certainly for once in his life "Old Pop," as he was known to an army of irreverent college men, had for-

gotten that he was the president of a famous American University, and the author of various treatises on comparative philosophies; he had forgotten that his sober silk hat was tipped rakishly to one side and that his coat was sprinkled with tinsel. Indeed, an observer would have said that this dignitary had forgotten everything except that he was abroad on a holiday, that it was Christmas Eve in Naples, that he was a bachelor of barely middle age, and that an uncommonly attractive and companionable girl was clinging to his left arm.

And why remember anything else? The Neapolitans were having a good time, and seemed disposed to share their fun.

Crowds of laughing, chattering, gaily dressed people of all classes and conditions surged through the streets, spread out over the open palazzos, and choked the narrower thoroughfares. Everywhere the bang! bang! of the *tricchi tracche* punctured with exclamation points the hum of happy peasants, and above the snap of firecrackers and the buzz of voices rose the strident notes of bagpipes, played by perambulent Calabrian musicians before the street shrines of the Madonna.

So contagious was the spirit of merriment that the whole party caught the infection, making it merely a subject of jest when from time to time the meeting of two opposing streams of humanity resulted in a temporary deadlock. And it was with much good-humored comment on demoralized headgear and neckties that in one of these blockades they escaped into a shop whose open doors offered a convenient haven. As it happened, it was a curio shop, and after a cursory round of the usual photographs, rosaries, and lava ornaments, the sight of certain quaint prints suddenly awakened the professor's scholarly instincts.

"Exquisite," he murmured, bending over a quaint presentment of a Pompeian feast, "absolutely unique. Ah-h, Miss Folsom," impressively, "I know you will appreciate —" and turning, the professor stopped short with that embarrassment that always follows an address to empty space.

For Miss Folsom was at the other end of the shop, listening to the explanation of the sale of State lottery tickets which the shopkeeper was giving to the rest of the party. Her feminine instinct felt the professor's discomfiture and brought her at once to his side.

"You will make me happy by accepting this as a Christmas present, — a little souvenir of our day at Pompeii," said the professor, with that distinguished urbanity that made one forget his forty-five years.

Indeed it was with quite the air of a comrade that Miss Folsom returned thanks for the holiday gift. "And I have one for you, too," she said, "only I can't divide it yet, and I can give you only half. No, I won't tell you what it is; wait and see," — with a certain tantalizing drawing down of her eyelids.

By this time they were on the street again and carried along by the crowd through the Villa Nazionale, Naples's most fashionable promenade, towards the Cathedral, whose majestic midnight mass would count half the holiday throng among its worshipers.

Just how it happened Professor Poppleton never knew, but within a block of their destination, where the pressure forced them into single file, a counter current in the throng engulfed him as a wave might, sweeping him away from Miss Folsom and the rest of the party into a black, narrow courtway like a hole in the wall. Before he could catch his breath or look around, another wave seemed to carry him straight through an open doorway into a hall, and thence to a grimy, gaudily decorated little room, where he found himself the center of a group of chattering, laughing, jubilantly enthusiastic Neapolitans.

Evidently, the professor thought, these fun-loving people had singled out the middle-aged foreigner as a target for one of their holiday jokes. It was annoying, but the American fell back on his philosophy and determined while in Naples to do as the Neapolitans do. He therefore beamed back at them and awaited developments. Apparently encouraged by his manner, the jokers — evidently of the peasant class, by their gay jackets and petticoats, and many-colored silk scarfs — crowded around him and began jabbering energetically, with frequent gestures toward their guest. Obviously their remarks concerned his personal appearance, and, taken in connection with the accompanying laughter, they were witty; but as the professor knew no more of the Neapolitan dialect than his hosts did of Greek or Sanscrit, he could only smile — in sickly fashion — and wait until their momentary exuberance should subside and he be released.

When the moments grew to ten, and then twenty, with no change in the situation, the professor determined to resort to that dignified diplomacy that had often served to quell excitement among those other irresponsible creatures — the undergraduates — and, still smiling, but with an air of decision, began to push his way toward the door. In an instant his way was blocked by a swarthy, pockmarked woman, whose eyes shone like hard lumps of coal beneath her headdress of orange silk, and who shook a key at him with would-be playfulness, to show that the door was locked. There was evidently more of the joke to come, and with a feeling of annoyance he turned toward his captors. At once their faces lighted, and several pointed significantly to his eyes.

Now one of the professor's eyes was of glass, and replaced an optic that he had sacrificed on the altar of chemistry. Upon that never-shifting, store-bought eye many a would-be college wit had rung the changes, but always at a safe distance. And here were these Neapolitans laughing in his very face at his affliction. If it was merely one of their "December liberties," it was an unkind one, and the professor's face flushed.

Meantime the chattering among his captors had reached that high pitch that means tense feeling, and their gestures showed that they were urging some action on one of their number. As if in answer to their motions, he presently pushed his way toward the professor, and holding his left hand within a few inches of that dignitary's face, with the forefinger of his left hand began slowly and meaningly to count the extended fingers.

A light broke upon the professor's mind; undoubtedly this was a hint that he was to buy his way to freedom.

Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he drew out a handful of coins of different denominations, which he placed triumphantly on the table; and then with a confident air turned to the door, only to meet with another repulse. For now a second man had been pushed forward and repeated the process of pointing to the professor's eye and counting his own fingers, while the rest chattered excitedly, by turns at him and each other, exactly like a cageful of angry monkeys.

By this time it had been borne in upon their unwilling guest

that this was no ordinary joke,— indeed, that it was no joke at all. The people had ceased smiling, and were very much in earnest. Several of the men glared at him with faces that bore villain written all over them; and even the women looked capable of wielding the stiletto.

In that second mere annoyance gave way to fear, as it flashed upon him that he had been deliberately kidnapped, on the open streets of the city, by a set little better than brigands, and that he was completely in their power.

Yet what could they want? More money? To think it was to pull out his purse and lay it on the table.

With gestures of impatience, his offering was pushed back, and the sickening pantomime of a moment before repeated, but with greater impressiveness.

And suddenly a frightful thought nearly undermined the professor's self-possession. These people wanted a ransom, and meant that if they did not get it they would put out his eyes. The idea seemed incredible, but it was backed up by long-forgotten stories that immediately flooded the unfortunate man's mind — stories of captured tourists subjected to horrible torture at the hands of Italian brigands. And the fact of his having but one eye made the prospective loss of that seem all the more terrible.

While the professor was by nature a peaceful, law-abiding citizen, who pooh-poohed the idea of carrying arms in a civilized city in the nineteenth century, he was not lacking in fiber — moral and physical. In an instant he assumed an attitude calculated to show that he could not be trifled with.

"I have given you all the money that belongs to me, and I have nothing that belongs to you," he thundered, "and I insist that you release me at once. Otherwise I shall report this outrage to the American consul."

But words and attitude alike seemed lost on this motley assembly, who simply looked at each other curiously, chatted in lowered tones, and finally all trooped out, the woman in the orange headdress bringing up in the rear with the single candle.

Then the door closed, the key clinked unpleasantly in the lock, and for the first time in his life the professor knew the meaning of absolute, unrelieved, impenetrable darkness.

Now fifteen years of university professorship had convinced Rufus Poppleton that he knew himself and could possess himself under any circumstances. He was, moreover, a lecturer on the Stoic virtues, and if confronted with such a case as this in the abstract, would have philosophized over the necessity of self-control under all circumstances. But here was a situation undreamed of in his philosophy. Rudely separated from his friends in one of the happiest moments of his life, ridiculed, insulted, browbeaten by a crowd of vicious foreigners, he had finally been locked up in this black, stuffy hole to await he knew not what torture on the morrow. The very blackness seemed to threaten all manner of horrors: it robbed him of his self-reliance and instilled into his mind a creeping fear that found outlet in the most childish performances.

Angry, panting, he felt his way to the window and pulled frantically at the solid iron bars. He shouted until he was hoarse, he kicked desperately on the unyielding panels, then leaned against the door, listening eagerly for some sign from without. But the silence was as oppressive as the blackness.

Groping carefully about the room, he finally discovered the table, and in a new access of rage and fear hurled it vainly against the door, and when the table was splintered used the pieces to smash the glass in the window. But without was only more blackness, as of a blind courtyard.

Another even more angry and childish assault on door, and window, and even the walls, left him so exhausted that he finally sank limply upon a long chest near the door, and tried to compose himself by sleep, in preparation for the next day's ordeal.

Even in this he was unsuccessful; for between fear and anger his brain was so inflamed that it persisted in reproducing over and over again the scenes he had just undergone as well as in rehearsing those still awaiting him. And the brief snatches of sleep that came to him brought dreams of such horror that waking was a relief. When finally toward morning exhaustion drugged him to slumber, it seemed that he had hardly closed his eyes when he was roused by the sound of voices, — to find himself once more surrounded by his captors.

At his first movement the woman with the orange headdress was at his side offering him a glass of Chianti, which he indig-

nantly refused. She was still urging upon him the wine and some bread when there was a stir at the door, a ripple of excited conversation among the group of Italians, and a man, evidently of the same nationality but a notch higher in the social scale, pushed his way through the respectful crowd to the captive, and in halting English wished him good morning.

In an instant the professor was on the alert.

"So you speak English, do you?" he said sternly. Then as the other gave a broken affirmative, he continued, "Very well; then tell me in English what this outrage means. As for your friends,"—here the speaker sprang to his feet and delivered his message with a fiery eloquence that he had never known he possessed,—"to them you may say that they have kept me here one night, they may keep me here three hundred and sixty-five nights, but never from a free-born American citizen will they extract five centesimi of ransom money. As for me—"

The last words were lost on the newcomer, who, with an altogether unaccountable smile, had turned to his countrymen, and with many wavings of the arms, and jerks of the head, and countings of the fingers, was apparently translating the professor's message.

And—still more unaccountable—as he progressed, a buzz of delight began to issue from the group around him,—a buzz that swelled with every word, bursting into a roar of joy, interspersed with delighted "bravos" as the interpreter concluded. The next moment the crowd surrounded their prisoner, laughing, beaming, fairly dancing in such an exuberance of joy and gratitude that some of the women actually attempted to kiss his hands.

But the professor's wrath had passed the point where it could be conciliated either by such demonstrations, or by the newcomer's polite invitation to visit his shop and hear all about the affair over some "rich wine."

"I don't want your wine," he said. "I want you to take me to the consul." And to the consul they went, where the ruffled man of letters,—his real eye, usually so pacific and benevolent, glaring almost as fiercely as his glass optic,—told his story.

When, finally, he finished his speech, with an impressive demand that the brigands who kidnapped him be properly punished, the consul looked mystified but conciliatory.

"Of course you know, Dr. Poppleton," he said, with due deference, "we don't have brigands in Italy in this century; and you admit that you were not robbed. Besides, as you know, last night was Christmas Eve, when practical jokes are in order. Still," he added hastily, as he saw an angry flush creeping over his visitor's face, "this certainly was carrying a practical joke too far, and I'll have the matter investigated and report to you this afternoon.

"But who is your companion?"

In a moment the interpreter, so far standing silent in the doorway, was explaining and apologizing all in a breath.

"It is very simple," he said, with a bland smile and a shrug of the shoulders. "I tried to explain in my shop. He refuse, he refuse my wine. He ask me take to consul. I bring him. So.

"Dis a man have de *assistito* — what you call the lucky eye," pointing to the professor's artificial optic. "Da people see dat eye, get him in da house so he can say some numbers for buy da lottery ticket. He no undustand and dey keepa him until I came in da morna. No hurt; no do noddings. Just letta him sleep."

While the man spoke the consul had cast a surreptitious glance at the American's artificial optic, and when the interpreter finished his speech, turned to the professor with a smile of comprehension.

"I see now," he said, "and I don't wonder you found the situtation incomprehensible. The fact is you've simply been made the victim of a peculiar Neapolitan superstition." Then he proceeded to explain the difference between the *jettatura*, or evil eye, and the *assistito*, or lucky eye, and their firm belief, strengthened by long inheritance, that any numbers spoken by the possessor of the latter were lucky numbers, and could be used to never-failing advantage in a lottery drawing.

"Your affliction brings you within the *assistito* class," he concluded, "and these people wanted you to give them some lucky numbers for the regular monthly drawing of the State lottery. It's as much a part of their life as their meals are. I suppose they couldn't get an interpreter last night and so kept you until morning. It's too bad you couldn't have understood what they wanted and given them the numbers before the interpreter came. Then you would have been released. But of course in any case," he added "it's an outrage, and they must apologize."

"But, confound it, I gave them no numbers," said the professor, struggling hard to maintain his dignity. "You don't suppose I would encourage such a superstition, do you?"

"How is that?" asked the consul, turning to the interpreter. "Didn't the gentleman give you the numbers?"

"Oh, yes, he do," said the shopkeeper, with a grin of satisfaction. "He say one night, three hundred and sixty-five nights, five centesimi,— thirteen thousand, six hundred and fifty-five. See?" exhibiting a slip of paper on which the number was written. "You play him, you win."

For a moment the professor looked sheepish, as he realized how easily he had been led into doing exactly what he had been expected to do. Even the consul could not suppress a smile.

"This may seem like a joke to some people," said the professor coldly, "but I want you to understand that I am going to prosecute these kidnappers of innocent Americans."

"I wouldn't, doctor," said the consul suavely. "I'm sorry you suffered this indignity, and I'll bring the matter before the foreign office at once. Meantime you have the satisfaction of knowing that every one of your supposed brigands will have pawned his bedding and jewelry to back your involuntary tip."

"It's an iniquitous practise, and a disgraceful business for a government to be in," retorted the other severely.

And though the consul protested that the people were bound to gamble, and that while a private concern would undoubtedly swindle them roundly, the government managed things with strictest honesty, devoting its small percentage of profit to lightening the burden of taxation, — indeed, in spite of all possible conciliations on the other's part, the professor went away only slightly mollified, and with his mind still set on reparation.

To discover on reaching his hotel that, according to previous arrangement, the Whipples and Miss Folsom had gone to Paris, leaving word for him to follow when he had "done Naples," added new fuel to the flames. And when at the consulate that afternoon he learned that he was offered no reparation beyond profuse apologies, his anger was so inflamed that he departed, rumbling out threats of bringing suit against the Italian government immediately upon his return. In fact, during his lonely voyage home—he had

missed the Whipples by a steamer — he went so far as to address a letter to his representative in Congress, asking an interview at the earliest possible date, concerning an important suit of international import that he had under consideration.

To this letter, posted immediately upon his arrival in New York, the professor received an immediate answer, in which the representative promised an interview at the end of three or four days to be given up to important debates.

But as it happened, Professor Poppleton did not wait three days,— indeed, he did not wait one day. And the cause of his haste was another letter, also bearing the Washington postmark, and arriving only one mail later. It read as follows: —

My dear Professor: — My long-cherished visions of art study and life abroad are at last to become realities, and you are the conjuror. This may sound like nonsense, but you'll see that it's anything but nonsense when I recall to you our Christmas Eve in the curio shop at Naples, when we exchanged gifts,— or, rather, one gift and the promise of another. It was those few minutes in the shop that made me acquainted with the Italian lottery system, and it was your present — it's over my desk now — that inspired me to buy the lottery ticket, half of which was to be my present to you.

This I did the next day, putting my money on a number recommended by one of the attendants at the hotel; he said it was sure to draw a prize, as it had been given a friend of his by a man with a lucky eye,— whatever that may be.

Anyway, the American consul at Naples has just cabled me that I have won the capital prize; and now I'm hoping for an opportunity to redeem in person my promise of Christmas Eve.

I write to express my hope that you will soon give me that opportunity.

Gratefully, ALICIA FOLSOM.

That was all, but it was enough not only to send the professor to Washington on the next train, but to inspire the note dated at the Arlington, which the amazed representative received only a day later,— a note in which the writer explained that he had decided to drop his proceedings against the Italian government, as he had "a more important suit on hand."

And curiously enough, though the professor and his wife make their home in Rome and Paris, one of their favorite trips is to an unenlightened place called Naples.

"Me and Mose."

BY ANNIE E. S. FEARING.

HE had many qualities in common with the sparrow which she outwardly resembled. She was small and plump, and had a waistless figure with a slight stoop behind the base of the neck that gave her a round, fluffy sort of look. Then her dress, and hair, and skin were only varying tones of a general dun color. Her movements were short and quick, and she had the same fierce instinct to fend for her family, and the same eager and critical interest in the doings of her neighbors, that distinguished her feathered prototype. Comparisons aside, she was a past mistress in the fine art of washing clothes, and her book of engagements was always full. No prima donna, haughtily breaking her appointments at will or whimsy, ever excelled her in glib and mendacious excuses for failing to appear at crucial moments, when the clothes were "over the floor" and the boiler was on the stove awaiting her. When she did come, she had to stand on a stool to reach the tubs, but from there she dominated the situation, and tongue and hands worked ceaselessly without interrupting each other. Her conception of conversation was monologue, and when she did allow a hiatus in which to receive directions or obtain an acquiescence, it was with an air of patience under temporary suspension, and you felt that you had only partial attention, while her thoughts were still carrying on the thread. Her cult was work. She gloried in the activities of the household, and life was never without excitement while the endless campaign against dirt and disorder went on. She had an eye for spots and blemishes and a passion for removing them. The artistic temperament is not limited in its avenues.

"I ben at it," she would say as she "sudsed out" the clothes, "sence I was little an' hed to stan' on a stool to work — wots

that? 'I hev to yit'? Well, that's jest it, I dun s' much it's kindy stunted me an' kep me on a stool ever sence."

There were two people in the world she thought forever exempt from effort, Mose, her husband, and her grown-up daughter. Mose had long suffered from some mysterious and disabling complaint "acrost his back," and the girl she regarded as a fragile creature whose only strong point was a "good appetite to eat." Nothing so roused her indignation as any suggestion that her Ettie might earn her bread on lines of employment similar to her own. The moral effect was not unlike that of urging a position as cook upon a princess of the blood.

"Mose Van Loan's girl go into somebody's kitchen? Well, I guess! Mis' Denton rode up t' our house one day in her carriage an' hed the impidence t' offer to take Ettie and *train* her fer a waitress! I think I see my pop's — old Tjerck TenEyck's gran'-chile a-handin' the butter 'round on a tray to the likes of them! North River Dutch is proud of their blood even wen they goes out washin', an' that woman's father worked out by the day for Mose's gran'father on the farm!"

I ventured to inquire to what high destiny Ettie's powers were reserved.

"Well," said the little creature, holding a garment up from the steaming tub, her head on one side like a bird, and her eye critically fixed on a doubtful spot, "I've got the refusal of suthin' wuth while in a milliner's shop fer Ettie; it's urrand-lady. The pay ain't much to speak of, but it's very respectable work, an' she may rise to be forelady — ef she don't git married!"

She rubbed away in silence for a moment on the obstinate spot and then held it up to the light, with a restored serenity of expression. From the radiance of her habitual toothless smile, one might have supposed that life was filled with the cheap joys of a merry-go-round, or instinct with the perpetual promise of a circus or a coming show, these being the coveted and dearly bought diversions of the family. In answer to a question she began again: —

"No, Ettie ain't got no beau on hand — I got my eye on that — she ain't agoin' to keep company with none of this here trash. I says ef some young man come along wots come of folks ez good

ez Mose's folks, an' wants to set up with her, I ain't got nothin' to say agin it — but I want to know his *folks*, I do!"

Here she wrung out the offending garment and tossed it into another tub. I felt that she had fully stated the prejudice and the obligation of long descent. Then she stripped the soapsuds off her bare arms and turned round on her stool to deliver herself of a thought too big for her to contain; and she had a very elfish look as, with one hand on her hip and the other holding out the forefinger, she emphasized her words.

"Wen it comes to hookin' up double, it's a solemn thing," — it would seem to have turned out a very momentous thing in her own case, — "ef you kin be *contented*," and she wagged her head in time with her finger, "ef you kin be *contented* — there ain't nothin' like it!"

Socrates himself could not have put the truth more concisely or have more comprehensively expounded the philosophy of matrimony than she upon the rostrum of her washing stool. She was the living embodiment of the art of contentment, and her great pop eyes looked through magic lenses that the wealth of the Indies cannot buy. Prince Charming could not have appeared to his lady love half so gallant and brave, so chivalric and brilliant, as poor old shuffling Mose, half blind, and blundering, and stupid to the point of semi-idiocy, looked to Marthy's devotion. Her respect for his astuteness was unlimited, and she always prefaced any statement that seemed to convey a deduction from facts with "ez Mose sez." I never knew any one except Marthy who had heard Mose say anything.

She guarded him and toiled for him with unremitting affection, and defended him from offers of jobs that were "too heavy fer the cords acrost his back," or that might "fetch on that there bleedin' of the lungs he hed wen he was a boy," a tradition he had long since imbued her with. She seemed like a feminine Sinbad with two human burdens astride her bowed shoulders instead of one, and there was no way to help her except to give her work that she might feed their insatiable maws. Any proffer of employment for Mose or Ettie, and she saw you through her magic glasses no longer a friend but a threatening enemy.

One bleak and bitter day in January she came to see me, and

from the way in which she radiated pleasure all over her little person, I knew that something momentous had occurred. For one wild moment I had a hope that Ettie had "hooked up double" and transferred her helplessness to a back more able to carry the load. Marthy worked herself up on a chair and sat with her feet dangling, and her hands folded in their gray cotton gloves across the old black shawl she wore around her. On her head was a sailor hat, and this youthful headgear, combined with her childish expression of joy, made of her a picture half farcical, half pathetic, of the youth of old age.

"Well," she said triumphantly, "you can't never guess wots happened now!"

I dared not attempt to fill in the pause. What I should have considered the workings of Providence in her behalf would have been insulting even to mention to her. Thus happily is it ordered that we do not lay down the lines of life for our fellows. She swung her foot in impatience of the silence.

"I've heired money!" she burst out at last, "heired most a thousand dollars!"

She pursed up her empty mouth like a hickory nut, and her eyes gleamed with the news. I expressed suitable sympathy with her happiness, and ventured the hope that now her future would be assured, and she need not worry about old age — not that she ever had. I even offered, with the design of saving her from herself, immediate suggestions as to getting it invested at a good rate of interest.

"Yes," she said evasively, "it comes in good jist now — it's from a old skinflint uncle er mine wot went out West years ago — they's a good deal we need. I say fust of all a good red plush parlor suit, but Ettie wants blue — an' that's wot I wanted your advice about, red er blue, wich'll wear best?"

There was a clear implication in tone and emphasis of the exact limit of the required advice, so I gave up and leaned back on Marthy's manifest destiny, abandoning all designs of capturing that money to save for her.

"I'm goin' to fix the front room fer Ettie! She's alwis wanted a real parlor, an' that'll be hers. Ef she ever *does* keep comp'ny it'll come in good, an' then Mose ain't never hed no proper chance

in life, an' I'm goin' t' see 't he gits it now! We ain't jist decided," she continued, with a wary reticence I well understood as covering some peculiarly outrageous and spendthrift design, "that is, we ain't quite sure wot Mose'll do yit with his'n. Of course, I cal'late to give him some more'n Ettie's share."

There was such an unconscious forgetfulness of self in it all that I had not the heart to express my vexation, and when she slid down off the chair and the moment came, as it usually did with her, when she had to be helped to make her exit, I was poor spirited enough to abandon my high ground altogether and wish her joy of the spending.

A short time afterward I was moved by curiosity to make an errand to the Van Loan apartments. There Ettie received me on the plush sofa — it was blue — with languid elegance, attired in a gay purple gown, while from her buttonhole hung a gold chain in token of the watch within. The room was unquestionably the achievement of the girl's ambition, and she surveyed the cheap pictures in their gaudy frames, the gilt wall paper, and the gay new carpet with proud satisfaction. On the backs of the chairs, depending from the corner of the mantel, and over the corner of a table between the windows, were gay and flimsy draperies which she called "throws." A young man, whose hat and overcoat lay on the brand new parlor organ, stood awkwardly shifting himself from one foot to the other during my visit.

"This is my gentleman friend," Ettie announced serenely, and I realized that the parlor had already borne fruit. "Yes, ma and pa's away," and she vouchsafed no further information. I wondered in what form Mose had decided to spend "his'n," but I was at least glad that he had the grace to take Marthy along to help him get rid of it.

"Don't you think it's handsome?" and Ettie indicated with a comprehensive wave of her hand, on which I noticed a flashy ring, the entire contents of the room, including her blushing admirer.

"Oh, certainly," I said weakly. "It's very, very rich."

I did not see Marthy until one day in the following May, and then she came bustling in to see if she could have back her "wash place."

"It's ben beautiful!" she said ecstatically, "the *beautifullest*

thing I ever seen, an' it's done Mose a heap er good! Yes, we ben South, clean on to Floridy! We've lived to good hotels, and done evything fust class, an' hed sich eatin' ez Mose said he never knowed they was in this world! You see Mose ain't never ben well, an' he *doos* feel the winters dretful. 'S he ses, he don't remember never to hev ben real warmed through sence he was born! So I jist thought of the plan myself, an' he was more'n pleased with it, an' I tell you we've jist hed one good swing to last a lifetime! 'S I tell Ettie, we've got s' much to tell it'll take years." Here her face fell for a moment. "Of course Ettie hedn't ought to went and got married while we's gone. My, there's quite a cobweb up on your wall! But I know his folks, an' they've got good blood, them Strykers. Come from down Momboccus way." She waited for some encouragement, and I tried vainly to think of a cheering thing to say. There was no need; she had the sort of heart that cheers itself.

"Ez Moses sez, 'it's too bad the boy ain't never got no work winters; he plays on a baseball nine summers, but we'll pull through somehow, ez long ez we keep together, an' I git my places back, an'" — she burst out bravely — "land's sakes, we ain't never wanted yit for vittles and drink, and we ain't agoin' to!"

The Cross of Fire.

BY BERT LESTON TAYLOR AND EDWARD WARD.

HE footing grew rapidly more toilsome. At every step now I sank ankle-deep in mud and water, sometimes settling to my knees. My light bamboo rod had become a rod of iron, my basket an old man of the sea; and had my feet been encased in shoes of lead they could have borne me scarce less willingly. Panting, puffing, and perspiring, I threw myself across the prostrate form of a long ago king of the forest; the huge trunk crumbled like Dead Sea fruit beneath my weight. Startled by this unexpected dissolution, I scrambled back to my feet. Then the heart-chilling truth struck me like a blow in the face.

I was lost! — lost in the heart of the Maine forest!

Familiar though you may be with those vast woods, stretching for scores of miles uninterrupted save by lake and stream, you, who have never been lost in them, can have but a faint conception of the numbing terror that gripped my heartstrings; while to the man who has never penetrated the depths of the primitive forest a description of my sensations must seem wild exaggeration.

I stood stunned, looking about me with eyes that I felt were starting from their sockets. The smiles on Nature's face swiftly changed to scowls; the soft, spicy breath of the woodland became the chill of the tomb, and the damp, moss-draped trees its moldering walls; the merry note of the thrush rang in my ears as the raven's croak of woe.

Then, as if pursued by the mocking hosts of Pan, I fled through the swamp, recking little now of mud and water which splashed to my eyes at every plunge; hither, thither, aimlessly, blindly, until I sank exhausted upon the spongy floor of the forest.

I shouted with what power was yet in my lungs, straining my ears the while for the answering call that did not come. My

voice was lost, absorbed, in the fungus of the trees and the moss of the ground,

I tore to tatters the bushes around me and dug my fingers deep in the carpet of eternal green. I wept "like a three years' child," sobbing and laughing by turns. And when my voice had dwindled to a whisper, when I could no longer beat back the fluttering wings of Silence, I sat in black despair, with my head bowed in my hands, that I might not see the grim, relentless savagery of my environs.

Reason slowly returned, and with it came a feeling of deep shame. Was I a woman? Could a woman have been weaker? "Courage, man!" I chided, and I tried to laugh as I finished the quotation,—"the hurt cannot be much." Men had been lost in the forest before, and some of them had returned.

Reflection suggested that, as the lake by which my guide had pitched our temporary camp must drain the country for miles about it, any stream I might chance upon would lead me to it. Later I knew, as you know, the folly of such a conclusion in such a country, where a man may, by short carries, pass from one stream to another flowing in an opposite direction. But the conclusion heartened me, and I contemplated with a growing calm the difficulties which lay between me and the civilization which even a lonely camp and a single comrade meant. "Every man his own Moses," I said lightly, and I wondered how one of the children of Israel would have fared if separated from that oldest of guides. I reeled up my line, flung away the shattered joints of the rod, took a drink from a well-filled flask, and started. It was now one o'clock.

I strove to keep a straight course, turning aside only for the greater obstructions, that I might minimize the circling so fatal to the compassless and inexperienced traveler. My persistence was rewarded. The cedar swamp gave place to firmer ground; I crossed a ridge, and passing over a gently descending slope, came with no little satisfaction upon a brook. This brought me, in the space of an hour, to a sizeable stream, along the banks of which I was enabled to travel at a much more rapid pace.

The afternoon drifted into twilight, my stock of courage declining with the sun. I now accelerated my pace, leaping from rock

to rock, and splashing through pools instead of going around them, when I found my progress temporarily checked by a huge mass of fallen and drifted trees that choked the narrow gorge through which the stream wound. As I stood surveying this formidable barrier I fancied I saw, through the network of decaying brush, the farewell rays of the setting sun. This betokened a clearing, and with renewed courage I cut with my hunting knife a passage through the boughy labyrinth.

The lake at last!

I stood on the dark shore and shouted; a loon answered me. I discharged my revolver into the air, saving the last cartridge; I might need that, I reflected. Besides, what need of wasting breath and ammunition? My guide would see the light of a fire, and would know that I was safe; and if he had found the canoe where I had beached it at the outlet, he would put in an appearance before long. I anticipated his quiet "I told you so,"—a convincing answer to my superior smile when, that morning, he earnestly warned me, who had no knowledge of the woods, against sallying forth without his companionship. His fears had been well grounded, but, thank fortune, no great harm was done.

I kindled a blaze, fed it with fuel ripped from the under side of a dead tree, as I had seen the guide do, and cooked some of the forgotten trout in my creel. After an unpalatable meal, washed down with the warm water of the lake, I smoked a pipe of comfort before the sputtering fire, which recalled the philosophical reflection that "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." The cheery heat induced a speedy drowsiness, and, dismissing expectation of seeing my fishing companion that night, I hauled a backlog for the fire and piled it high with brush, and lay down to dreams of a pleasanter morrow.

When I awoke, my limbs were cramped from cold and the exertions of the preceding day, but I turned toward the lake with expectant eyes. One look, and a chill crept into my heart.

It was not the lake I sought!

You, secure in your environments, have stood upon such a shore and looked upon such a picture. Nature's lines were unblurred by the smoke from campfire of fisherman or lumberer. The distant, wood-girt shores were without sign of man or beast. The mist

that hung upon the surface of the lake was as yet unstirred by the rays of the forest-hidden sun. Not a trout leaped, not a tree swayed, not a bird soared into the deepening blue. The solitude was complete; there was nothing lacking. It was Balzac's picture of the desert; it was God without mankind!

You, I say, have looked upon such a scene; but it has been with a poet's eye and an artist's sense of the beautiful. You have turned from it uplifted, and thought of life. I turned from it crushed, and thought of death!

It would be as tedious as impossible to detail my wanderings of the ensuing five days. Mile upon mile I drifted, following the windings of the shores of lakes and the banks of streams, living on fish when hunger compelled me to a nauseous meal, and on what few berries I could find; cut and bruised by countless falls, drenched by rains and tortured by insects. I dreaded the approach of night; I shuddered when I woke and faced another day. Even now I do not like to think upon that time. My hair is bleached; it whitened then. Let me come to the afternoon of the seventh day, when I found myself too weak to continue the struggle for existence. My feet were torn and bleeding, my clothing was in shreds, the liquor which had sustained me was gone, to the last precious golden drop, and I shook with fever. A light rain was falling.

I stood in a narrow cañon on the bank of a wild and rocky stream. Above me was a dull, gray sky; around me a shaggy, dripping wall of green. I took from my pocket the single cartridge and watched it with burning, fascinated eyes as it rolled about in my trembling palm. To me it was no longer lead and brass; it was a precious stone set in a tiny cylinder of gold — a gem that I would not then have exchanged for the crown jewels of an emperor. For this meant release from an existence that had become hideous.

And yet, in that awful moment, I clung to the hope that perishes only with life. Clutching fast that solitary cartridge, I shouted — once, twice, thrice. The dull roar of the rapids was the answer.

I loaded the revolver. "God forgive me!" I murmured, and cast my eyes upward.

At that instant I saw a face — the face of a man!

He was peering down at me from among the bushes that fringed the brink of a cataract which I stood facing. It was an old, a half-savage face, framed in a shock of long, unkempt, graying hair, and lighted by eyes that glittered behind shaggy, overfalling eyebrows; but to me — to me it was the face of an angel!

I stood transfixed, doubting the evidence of my eyes. Then, with a sob of joy, I advanced slowly with arms upraised. The old man vanished, but a moment later I saw him creeping across the shelf over which the torrent flung itself.

"Stop!" I cried. "Don't leave me! My God, don't leave me!" He made no answer, nor even glanced back.

"Stop!" I shrieked again, in a frenzy of rage and cheated hope. "Stop — or I'll murder you!"

I raised the revolver, but dropped it with a cry of horror. The man had leaped for an overhanging bush, had slipped on the wet rocks and fallen from the shelf, clutching at the air. His body struck a projection midway of the cliff, and bounded to the rocky bed of the stream.

I floundered into the torrent, opposing the strength of desperation to the rushing waters. They swept the body to my eager arms, and on hands and knees I dragged it, treasure trove, to the opposite bank. The old man's eyes were closed, and a crimson stream trickled from a cut over one temple. I looked upon him in fierce pity and blind resentment.

"Unhappy wretch!" I cried, "could you not let me die without this added torment? Have I found a human being in this hell of solitude only to lose him?"

Then my mood changed. I flung myself down beside the man, and in babbling phrases besought him to live — to live, if but for an hour. Weak, worn, and selfish, I thought only of my own hapless condition.

The gray, sunken orbs unclosed. There was reproach, but not malice in them. "To my cabin — yonder," he whispered, indicating with his eyes the direction he could not lift his hand to point.

Through the dripping bushes I half dragged, half carried him, up a steep and winding trail that led to his dwelling. I laid him

upon his bunk, washed the blood from his face, replaced his wet garments with dry ones that hung from a peg, and poured down his throat liquor found in a locker. He revived, and thanked me with his melancholy gray eyes, in which wonder and pity were mingled.

"You are exhausted," he said. "There is food in the locker."

The reminder was timely. In another minute I should have sunk to the floor. A draught of the liquor put life in my veins, and I ate ravenously of the food. Then I kindled a fire, and as I stood drying my dripping extremities before the crackling blaze, I surveyed my surroundings.

The cabin was a rude affair, built of mammoth logs chinked with clay and moss. The flat roof was fashioned of long splints of spruce, with heavier strips of the same for the floor. There was but the one room, spacious, cobwebbed, and smoke-grimed, with a large, irregular window consisting of a single sheet of glass set into the clay plastering, and a huge fireplace and chimney of rough rock. I noted the single bunk, a table and two stools, the pelt of a black bear stretched before the hearth, and above it an immense pair of antlers, from which depended a rifle and rod. I was not a little surprised to see in this lodge of the wilderness a shelf of books of uncommon size and appearance and a quantity of maps and charts, besides a very large map of the world, which covered the larger part of one wall. But there were still other objects in the cabin that excited more than passing wonder.

In one corner stood a wooden, sink-shaped frame, fitted with drivewheel, belt, and treadle. Later I knew that it was a grinding and polishing machine. In the center of the box, which was sprinkled with dust and powder, was a horizontal disc; standing along the wall, underneath were other discs of varying sizes, the largest about four feet in diameter, while on a neighboring shelf were lenses in various stages of completion, together with irregular-shaped chunks of glass.

A movement from the bunk drew my attention back to the owner of the cabin. He had raised himself upon his elbow, and was signing for me to draw near.

"You will live?" I said, half appealingly, as I pushed a stool to his side and took, not without a qualm, his cold, claw-like hand.

Since we had reached the cabin I had given no thought to the nature or extent of the injuries he had sustained by his fearful fall.

"I will live — for an hour; perhaps less, perhaps more," he replied. "And in that time I must give to you the result of a lifetime of dreaming, of hope, and of accomplishment. Do not seek to interrupt me; there is no time for that."

You must not suppose that these words or the story which succeeded were uttered in the unbroken strain of my repetition. There were frequent intervals, short and long, during which he gasped, choked, or clutched at his breast, as if the recital caused him intense agony. These were the tragic details which served to stamp his words indelibly upon the tablets of my memory,— details which I cannot, do not, desire to recall. I repeat the story as I remember it; for its brevity my own folly is responsible.

"Ten years ago," said he, "I ostracized myself from my kind, and came to this wilderness to work out the dream of my life. It is accomplished. At last I have perfected an invention of incalculable value. By its means a man, standing at any spot, may see half way around the globe, in any direction. By its means one eye can watch the movements of the world's millions. I do not expect you to believe me without the proof. Your own eyes shall attest the truth of my words.

"For twenty years I have experimented with the forces of nature, my chief studies being in optics and electricity. Like nearly everybody else who has dabbled in the former science, I early tried my hand at the manufacture of high-power lenses, and encountered the usual obstacles to going beyond certain limits, which limits are represented by the most powerful microscopes and telescopes now in use.

"I knew that glass was not an absolute non-conductor of electricity, and one day I discovered that, when subjected to a powerful continuous current, it undergoes, under favorable conditions, certain molecular changes, which annul its chromatic properties. You can better realize the importance of this discovery when I tell you that it is chiefly on account of the chromatic properties of glass that lenses of vastly greater power than those now known to science have been impossible. I was now in possession of a fact

which would enable me to make lenses hundreds of times more powerful than had ever been dreamed of.

"Here in this wilderness, where no man's foot save mine had been since, perhaps, the days of the savage, I built this cabin, and here I lived and wrought. First, I made a microscope, fitting it with a high-grade electrical lens, and I can best give you an idea of the power of the instrument when I tell you that with it I have been enabled to study the ultimate atomic structure of matter. Startling revelations as to the nature and properties of both atoms and molecules, with all the other details of my life work and discoveries, may be found in papers of which I will later tell you.

"Then I built my masterpiece, my telescope. I spent years in grinding and polishing the lenses. The objective is so arranged that when it is in use 150,000 volts of electricity pass through it continuously. I shall not attempt to tell you what I have seen in the heavens; my published observations will upset half the guesses of modern astronomy. There is a more practical, financial value attached to my discovery.

"Within half an hour I can tell you how many ships are plowing the waters of the Mediterranean, the English Channel, or what you will. I can locate the precise position of any army or fleet in Europe. You see the possibilities of the thing are stupendous, enormous. What nation but would give millions for the possession of such a potent instrument for war or peace!"

The man's eyes glowed with the fire of enthusiasm; and I, who had been sitting spellbound,— I at this point smiled, as you are smiling now. I was no scientist, but I could doubt and scoff with the best of them.

The old scientist saw my smile, and a trace of irritation rested for an instant upon his face.

"That is my story," said he. "And now for the proofs. Come, a draught of the liquor, and then your arm. I shall live for hours yet. You shall see! You shall see!"

With a flash of strength, generated by a powerful excitement, he dragged me out and around the cabin, where a narrow footpath led up the hill through the forest. Here he collapsed, and, as he was no great burden, I took him upon my back. The rain had ceased, and the sun broke through the clouds.

At the top of the slope we came out into a species of basin. For a radius of two hundred feet or more the trees had been felled, but only in part removed, and around this chaos of fallen and decaying timber the untouched forest rose, tier upon tier. A strange, wild scene it was, and the strangest object in it was an enormous telescope of wood, mounted upon a pier formed by two stumps, across which a heavy beam had been fixed. The tube was poised on a huge wooden pin at the center of this crossbeam, and around the pier a deep space had been cleared. Between the supporting stumps stood an old leather-covered chest, from which issued wires that connected with, and ran along the sides of, the telescope, first passing through what I took to be a switchboard, such as I had seen in telegraph or telephone offices. This was fastened to the crosspiece, and although I examined the entire apparatus more closely the next day, I cannot describe it to you more intelligibly. I was and am densely ignorant in such matters. An unmechanical mind is helpless before machinery of the least complexity.

While my wondering eye made note of these things my companion had crawled into the pit. He directed me to remove the oiled canvas that protected the object-glass of the telescope, and then swung the vast tube skyward. A few rapid touches at the keys on the switchboard and of adjustment of the tube, and with one hand still controlling the wires, he stepped back with an eager "Look!"

In astonishment I glanced from him to the sky, toward which the instrument still pointed. There was naught there but a few fleecy clouds.

"Look!" he repeated impatiently, and I placed myself at the eyepiece.

I looked upon the sea, blue as the heaven above me. White sails dotted its surface, and the shore line was broken by cliffs and a glimpse of a village. As I gazed, wonder bound, the picture grew in distinctness, and I made out, not only dwellings, but the forms of men and women. Startled, I sprang back, and glanced up and around me, and encountered the triumphant, half-scornful smile of my companion.

"There are no pictures, no photographs," he said, reading my thoughts. "You have just seen the Mediterranean."

I could not well contradict him; I had never looked upon it before. But all my pent-up doubts and objections welled forth in one explosive inquiry:—

"The curvature of the earth?"—

"Is obviated by my cloud-mirrors," he replied calmly. "Thus do I deflect the rays of light. It is all explained and worked out in my papers. There is nothing left to chance. Now for a glimpse of the Hawaiian Islands."

He swung the telescope swiftly round, elevating it a trifle more in the adjustment. Again I clapped my eye to the tube, and again the picture grew until every object in the field of vision stood out in cameo-like relief. An exclamation escaped my lips. I descried a palace with spacious grounds; but it was not merely a picture, it was a scene of action. Men were fighting for their lives. Puffs of white spoke of volleys of musketry. I caught myself listening for the reports.* Bewildered beyond expression, I turned to my companion.

"Show me London!" I cried. "That I know, and in that I cannot be deceived."

A spasm contorted his face. He reeled, and would have fallen had I not caught him. He pushed me away and turned to the telescope.

"Doubter!" he muttered hoarsely. "Doubt no longer!"

I waited in brutal impatience while, in manifest suffering, he made the necessary adjustments, and eagerly sought the tube. One glance, and every shadow of incredulity vanished. For I saw as plainly as I see the words I write, the Houses of Parliament, the Tower, the bridge, the river, and a score more of objects as familiar to me as the streets of New York. It was London beyond question.

Don't remind me of what I told myself a hundred times before that moment. Never was there man more practical, less given to dreaming than myself. But I looked, I saw, and I was convinced.

Suddenly the picture vanished, and I turned questioningly to

* At the time I looked through the telescope I had no conception of the nature of the disturbance on the Pacific isle, nor did I give more than a passing thought to it. I afterward ascertained that what I saw was the uprising headed by Messrs. Wilcox and Boyd, which culminated in the struggle in the palace grounds at Honolulu on the thirtieth of July, 1889. Tidings of this event were not published in the press of this country until a week or more after its occurrence.

my companion. His hand was no longer at the switchboard; he had fallen on his face. I caught him up and staggered back to the cabin. As I laid him upon his bunk he tried to speak, but a hemorrhage prevented. His injuries, whatever they might be, were internal.

In sudden dismay I reflected upon what his death meant. "Man, man, you must not die!" I burst out. "This discovery must not be lost to the world. I will summon assistance! You shall live! You shall live!"

"Fool!" I heard him gasp as I ran out of the cabin and down the winding trail. And "Fool!" I echoed as I stood on the bank of the river and looked about me helplessly. I hurried back to the cabin.

The old man was dead. I was again alone in the wilderness.

The next morning I gave him such sepulture as was possible in the primeval wild. Though it mattered little what spot was set apart in that vast tomb, I buried him where, I thought, he could have wished to sleep — beneath the monument his genius had wrought. Above his rude grave the big tube still pointed skyward, and the subtle forces that operated it still coursed through the connecting wires; but the cunning hand that controlled those forces was cold in death. A scientist might have read the secret after an hour's study; to me it was the profoundest of mysteries. I replaced the protecting cover of oiled canvas, and so left it, with a long backward look.

The remainder of the day I passed in preparing for a return to the world. In what part of the Maine wilderness I was, I had of course no means of guessing. I had forgotten, had delayed until too late, to ascertain that important fact from the only source of information open to me. There was not a scrap of paper, nothing on the various charts and maps upon the walls of the cabin, that might cast light upon my position. As for the papers containing the details of the dead scientist's marvelous works, I gave to them no thought whatever. My all-absorbing idea was to get back to civilization.

Though still utterly at sea as to my exact location on the face of the earth, I was now well equipped for a voyage of discovery, as canoe, compass, rifle, lines and hooks, food and liquor, were at

my command. I reasoned that if I journeyed doggedly toward the south, availing myself of lake and stream only when these trended southerly, and blazing a trail as closely as a natural haste admitted of, I should not only reach the confines of civilization, but be able to go back at my leisure over the path I had made.

So the next morning, at the first sign of daylight, I started. Half a mile or more down the river the rips gave place to deep water, and here I embarked. The stream still ran so swiftly that a paddle was needed only for purposes of steering, and after a time I noted with surprise that it was nothing else than an inclined liquid plane, down which I shot with a rapidity that was exhilarating, but productive of not a little uneasiness. For a mile or two there was no break in the parallel walls of forest, but in time these gave way to precipitous banks of rock which rose gradually to a height of some thirty feet. I noted now with genuine alarm that the cañon was contracting at its crests and the watery plane becoming steeper; that I was being swept along, without power to check myself, into a veritable tunnel. While I was watching the vanishing patch of sky, a peculiar roaring noise drew my eyes back to the stream. I had a glimpse of a towering wall of rock, a cavern around which the water was dashed into foam, then the blackness of night, and I fell senseless upon the floor of the canoe.

When I came to myself the murmur of running water was still in my ears, but the canoe was stationary, entangled in a network of alders, through which the blessed light of heaven struggled. My subterranean voyage could not have been of great length, as the sun was not yet over the trees. Wondering what fresh surprises fate had in store, I cut a passage for the canoe through the alders, and pushed out upon the bosom of a lake.

It was not a large body of water, and had, in fact, the appearance of newly flowed land, being wooded to the water's edge and without sign of beach. The forest rose gently to low-lying hills, but not a peak of significance broke the sky line. On all sides the irregular shore presented the same picture as above the hidden inlet whence I had emerged.

Scanning this spot for some sort of a landmark, my eyes rested upon a giant white pine, dismantled by the lightning, which lifted

its gaunt, shattered form above its brethren into the rosy field of the coming day. Near the top the trunk had been split vertically and transversely by the freakish bolt, so that the fissures presented the appearance of an almost perfect cross. As I looked, the sun rose directly behind this pine, and the fissures became a cross of living fire!

I explored the lake, paddling slowly around the shore and searching carefully for an outlet. Finding none, I decided that, like the inlet, it must be subterranean.

A fortnight later, after incredible exertions, I reached the north bay of Moosehead Lake.

. . . . . .

Away up near the headwaters of the Penobscot I have a cabin, and for seven years my home has been the Maine woods. Upon one wall of that cabin hangs a vast map of Maine. It is ruled off into squares, each representing a mile of the State's surface. Across the forty-sixth parallel, from Canada on the west to the eastern boundary of Piscataquis County, and thence northerly, is drawn a heavy black line, and within the territory thus set off two hundred or more squares have been checked as one would check an invoice.

Seven years I have devoted to a quest that to others would seem madness. In company with an Indian guide, who knows those woods as a child knows its mother, I have tramped hundreds of miles, moving from square to square on my map as a pawn on the chessboard. I have explored thoroughly the Chesuncook and Chamberlain Lake country, and next spring I shall range the territory between the Allaguash and the St. John. Seven times have the snows of winter sent me back to my cabin, but each spring finds my spirit keener than before, even though my bodily strength wanes.

It is not likely, and yet it may be, that what I seek lies without the boundaries I have drawn. In spite of my efforts to keep a straight course to the south, my path out of the wilderness must have been at best a winding one. During a shower, a drop of water lodged in my compass and seriously disturbed the needle.

But I have twice crossed that trail, verifying it by my handiwork upon the trees and by certain landmarks, so that it is not

altogether in despair of eventual success that I reveal a secret that for seven years I have kept, even from the companion of my quest. But now I am a wreck of my former rugged self, and each year finds me less fitted to withstand the perils and hardships that attend upon my search.

I record these facts, that, should disaster overtake me, the secret may not perish with me; that some man more fortunate than I may find the square which holds that lost lake of the northern wilds, where at sunrise a cross of fire blazes above the gateway to millions.

A Witness of War.

BY VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD.

THERE was great excitement at the old Disborough place. Doors and windows that had been forbiddingly barred until well-nigh rusted from their hinges stood open to the summer sunshine. The wind blew through rooms which long had been possessed solely by moth, and rust, and the drear, ghostly atmosphere of departed days. To the fences, fallen and overrun by blackberry vines, were tied teams which represented all the families in the county who could boast of the Disborough connection.

Disburys, with handkerchiefs stuck in their unaccustomed collars, walked about heavily in their Sunday boots, and fanned themselves with their Sunday hats, glancing askance at the Disboro's who came over from Clarkville in a road cart. To all of them alike, without distinction of persons, had been extended the invitation that for a fortnight past had appeared in the form of a placard decorating the town pump, and courthouse wall, and the sycamores at the lane leading to the old Disborough place.

NOTICE.

Whereas the property of the late Nathan Disborough of this county will be sold at auction on June 7, at 3 o'clock, all interested in the disposition of household goods, etc., are hereby notified.

(Signed.) Francis Disborough,
James Yellott, County Solicitors.

For one member of the Disborough family alone — and she that one who by birth should have been the owner of the estate — the invitation thus extended was null and void.

From the day, thirty years ago, when Nathan Disborough's orphan niece and adopted daughter, Rosetta, had refused to become his heir on condition of living single all her days at the old homestead, and so keeping the property from dwindling into improvident channels,— from that day she had never so much as lifted the latch of her girlhood's home. Some said that when she not only declined his offer, but announced her intention of marrying Giles Drew — almost in the same breath — her uncle drove her from the house. At any rate it was known that he forbade her ever to enter the place again; and the next day she married Giles Drew.

Soon after her marriage the war broke out. Nathan Disborough closed his house, and enlisted, first demanding of the town authorities that his property should remain unmolested until he saw fit to return. Or, in event of his death in the army, the house was to stay closed for thirty years, and then be sold for taxes.

After the Battle of Gettysburg, Nathan Disborough was among the killed. Rosetta Drew left town and returned with the body of her uncle, which she had decently buried at her own expense at the back of his place. His sword and knapsack she handed to Lawyer Disborough, a distant cousin, who, after the funeral, hung them on a nail in the front hall of the old house. Then the place was closed and deserted, and gradually almost forgotten. Even the negroes left it unmolested, the younger generation being reared upon the superstition that it was haunted by old Nathan Disborough, who would bring back any of his possessions which might be purloined.

Meantime Rosetta Drew had become a widow, and earned a somewhat straitened living for herself and child by dressmaking, — a fact in which those of the connection who owed her a grudge as being the cause of all this coil, traced a signal retribution.

Only Miss Eunice Disborough, a familiar visitor at the old place in the days of Rosetta's girlhood, saw something pathetic in the fact that from the attic windows of Mrs. Drew's little frame house the tall chimneys of her old home were distinctly visible.

To-day as Miss Eunice sat in one corner of the musty parlor, and watched Disboroughs to the tenth degree of cousinship finger

the sacred furniture as they might poultry or vegetables, the thought of the banished one weighed heavily.

"I never knew poor Nathan had so many kith and kin," she said plaintively to Mrs. Lias Disborough, who occupied nearly the whole of a massive haircloth sofa. "It does seem too bad for Rosetta not to be here. You know it was her childhood's home, and it went harder to leave it — and him — than any one knew. Nathan was a man of his own way, but he had a good heart."

"Nathan was my third cousin once removed," said Mrs. John Disborough aggressively.

"Rosetta has made her bed, and must lie in it," said Mrs. Lias with oracular emphasis. "She's got no more claim on the property than a stranger,— not as much as we have, seeing she was forbidden the house; though it might have belonged to her if she hadn't been so heady."

"They appear to be talking of the village dressmaker," said Miss Adêle Disboro'— to a loud whisper from her mother. And then both turned their attention to certain antique andirons and candlesticks with an air that disposed of Rosetta as far as any possible connection with the Disborough estate was concerned.

"There's a heap of good china, real India most of it, that belonged to Cousin Nathan's mother," went on Mrs. Lias. "It's a wonder the place hasn't been robbed time and again."

"It's because the negroes believe it's haunted," said Miss Eunice. "Rosetta Drew's old Cassy, who lived here, declares that if anything is taken from this place it will come back, and seems to me I know how she feels. Things do get sort of human, you know, just belongin' to one place for so long. I don't believe I could imagine that old blue jar in another fireplace 'cept Cousin Nathan's. Why, Rosetta and I filled that jar with rose leaves the very summer" — Miss Eunice paused, and gazed at the jar with a vision of the past in her eyes. Mrs. Lias fanned contemptuously. Cousin Eunice was so unpractical: that very jar would make an excellent umbrella stand!

"And Rosetta cared a heap for all these things. She talks of 'em yet to me," went on Miss Eunice.

"Then she was a fool to take Giles Drew instead, that's all," said Mrs. Lias.

"I don't know, Susan; s'pose she'd just lived 'long here, not marrying nor anybody to keep her company; maybe she'd grown hard and close-fisted. Whereas she's been tried in the fire of adversity, and she's softened in spirit, and she's got Rosy, too. It's a great thing to have somebody to love, Susan — "

"Mercy, Cousin Eunice!" said Mrs. Lias, in a tone arguing that there is no use talking business to sentimental people. "Here they come," as the auctioneer entered with Lawyer Disborough and a man carrying a pine table. "Lias! Where's Lias? Be sure and bid first on the mahogany table. It does seem as though the nearest of kin ought to get things almost for nothing."

The spirit of competition is contagious, and creates its own excited atmosphere. As piece by piece was denoted and sold at abnormally small prices (some of it impervious to time, some in varied stages of decay) the crowd pressed closer to the windows and doors. By and by the blue jar stood austerely beside Mrs. Lias; the clock on the landing was knocked down to Mrs. Augustus, because it looked antique; and old settles, pictures, chairs, and looking-glasses went for a song, a song on a low key. Mr. John and Mrs. Lias bid against each other more than once, but in the midst of the excitement little Miss Eunice bid nothing at all.

"I can't imagine what she came for," said Mrs. Lias in a whisper, "she's as poor as a church mouse!"

"Wasn't Cousin Nathan a beau of hers once?" asked somebody else.

"Dear knows!" said Mrs. Lias, shaking her head at her husband, who had so far forgotten himself as to bid on a family Bible.

Soon there was but little of value left. A mass of undesired articles stood in the hall awaiting transportation to the junk shop, and there rested on the table beside the auctioneer only a portrait of Nathan Disborough as a young man, and the sword and knapsack which had been hung in the hall the day he was buried.

"Everything of value has been disposed of," said the auctioneer; "I suppose these can go with the things to the shop."

"Mercy! I'd like to know who wants 'em!" said Mrs. Lias.

Little Miss Eunice sat upright and gazed at the picture. There was a stir outside, and a man put his head in the window. "Mrs. Drew bids one dollar on the picture."

"Rosetta!" breathed Miss Eunice.

"Well, the idea of her coming here and bidding a dollar on that old thing, as poor as she is!" said Mrs. Lias.

"This portrait, ladies and gentlemen, one dollar — one dollar — one dollar! Going! Going! Going at one dollar! GONE!"

"I'll take the sword and knapsack, please," said Miss Eunice's voice faintly. And while Mrs. Lias sniffed audibly, and Mrs. Augustus raised her lorgnette, the sword and knapsack were knocked down to Miss Eunice for a trifle, and she took them reverently and sat with them in her lap.

"I been thinkin' since I sat here," she said apologetically to Mrs. Lias, "I been thinkin' nobody really cares for anything that was his 'cept Rosetta, and — and — he wore these in battle, and there's no telling how sorry he might have been before he died. 'Cause he'd a good heart under his gruffness, Nathan had."

And then there was a sudden raising of voices which had been subdued, and the odor of roses sweeping in carried out the scent of age and mold. The past lost its ghostliness in the contact of dollars and cents. Mrs. John ordered a looking-glass with a ship painted over it to be packed in the front of the wagon, and Mrs. Lias, with her head out the window, superintended the transportation of the mahogany table, leaf by leaf. When she drew her head in the window, she said: —

"Rosetta's standing out there with her old Cassy, waiting for that picture. Somebody might as well hand it out to her! Mercy, Cousin Eunice! What's the matter?"

Miss Eunice stood alone in the middle of the room looking white. The sword lay on a chair, the knapsack hung from one hand, and in the other was a piece of yellow paper, found between the lining and outside of the knapsack, and which she now held out mutely to Lawyer Disborough.

As the attorney glanced hurriedly over the paper, those nearest him detected a shade of excitement cross his face. Then he rapped on the table.

"Wait, if you please!" Every one stood still, and those near the door said "Sh" to those whose boots creaked outside.

Then Mr. Yellott was summoned, and the two men bent over the paper together. There was no sound except for the kicking

of a horse outside, and the humming of a bee that flew in one window and out the other.

Finally the lawyer straightened up, and spoke impressively: —

"An exceedingly important discovery has been made. Is Rosetta Drew present?"

"She won't come in, Rosetta won't," said Miss Eunice; "she hasn't been in since she was forbidden."

"Then I will go to her." Lawyer Disborough left the room and a wondering silence behind him. When he entered again there followed slowly, reluctantly, a woman, pale, worn, and gray haired, who stopped upon the sill, and stood with her eyes fixed longingly upon the interior.

"Rosetta!" said Miss Eunice. Lawyer Disborough rapped on the table. "The letter which has just been found," he said aloud, "was written by the late Nathan Disborough to his niece, Mrs. Drew, on the eve of the Battle of Gettysburg. She requests me to read it aloud.

"June 30, 1863.

"*My Dear Niece Rosetta:* If I get back alive there is no use of this letter, because I can tell you. But lest I don't, I will give a copy to William Yellott to-morrow. Seeing death so often has brought a heap of things home to me. I was hasty in sending you away, and you were right to marry the man you loved, and I suppose I was wrong trying to hinder it — "

There was a stifled sob from Miss Eunice, who sank in a chair and covered her face.

"I want you to know I am not as hard as I seemed — "

"He wasn't! He wasn't!" sobbed Miss Eunice.

"I want to do right by you, and if I don't get back I want you to have the house and land together with fifteen thousand dollars in gold now in the Bank of Deposit. And this must hold good in any court of law. I was wrong in letting you think me a poor man, and I hope you will forgive me.

"Your affectionate uncle, NATHAN DISBOROUGH."

Following were the signature of three witnesses.

"What became of William Yellott, of this place?" said Lawyer Disborough, in the silence following.

"My brother died at Gettysburg on July first, the same day with Nathan Disborough," spoke Solicitor Yellott.

"I suppose you all know that this is a perfectly legal bequest," said Lawyer Disborough, addressing the astonished assembly,

"although it was found in so remarkable a way. In the letter is a draft on the Bank of Deposit, to be paid to the order of Mrs. Drew. Yesterday I was informed by the bank officers of a sum of money deposited by Nathan Disborough, still lying idle, to remain until he ordered its withdrawal. Therefore Mrs. Drew is quite an heiress. Cousin Rosetta, let me congratulate you."

The woman in the doorway caught Miss Eunice's arm. "He's asked me to come home," she said softly. "It's what I've prayed for." And the light of ineffable joy irradiated her face.

Of course the sale was pronounced null, and while husbands and brothers were despatched to return the household gods to their shrines and to receive the money given for their purchase, the wives and sisters crowded around Rosetta with cousinly congratulations. To them all, however, she listened with the slightly dazed, abstracted air of one not wholly awakened from a dream.

When finally the last piece of furniture was borne back to the house, and the last vehicle had vanished in a cloud of dust, Rosetta Drew and Miss Eunice, still lingering in the doorway, looked at each other with eyes that ignored the incongruous collection heaped all about them.

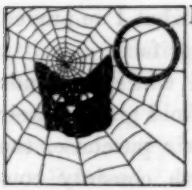
"We'll live here together, Cousin Eunice, you and Rosy and I, and we'll keep the picture in the hall, because he's welcomed us back," said Rosetta softly.

"And if you don't mind, Rosetta," said Miss Eunice, beaming with happiness, and holding up the sword, "I'll just keep this for myself, because it was the last thing that belonged to him."

But old Cassy waved her cane triumphantly towards the articles piled in the hall. "Whut I tell you, honey?" she said. "Dey's all come back, dey shorely has all come back!"

The Copeland Collection.

BY MARGARET DODGE.



IF the personality of things deemed inanimate there is no evidence more convincing than the case of the man possessed by his possessions. Sometimes it is a hundred-year-old clock, sometimes a china teapot, sometimes a "body brussels" carpet, for whose safety and specklessness a whole household must regulate their habits and sacrifice their comfort, making of their one-time servant a veritable household god.

But to inspire absolute fetish worship nothing compares with a great family library, — not one of the decorative variety, but a collection into which have passed the wit and work, the hours and desires of a devotee of single mind and purpose.

Such a library, with its domination intensified by the loving service of three generations of owners, so called, was the Copeland Shakespeare Collection. A library of such glorious proportions as to fill the four sides of the green-rep-hung book room of the square, white house whose Greek portico opened on the chief street of Newtown. A library of such completeness, such rare variorums and folios, such priceless commentaries, such curiosities of French and German, and even Finnish and Slavonic translations of the immortal dramatist, as to draw Shakespeare lovers and rare volume fanciers not only from Boston, thirty miles away, but from Cambridge, and New Haven, and Philadelphia, and New York. Even potent Oxford dons and Schlegel-steeped German critics from Berlin and Heidelberg had been moved by the mere report of it to cherish desires in direct opposition to the Eighth Commandment. For the mint did not exist that could coin the money to buy a single volume of these thousands, said Horatio Copeland, when approached with offers whose fabulous size were for years Newtown's measure of opulence.

Withal, this was no cold and formal collection, but one that invited intimacy and responded to the touch of tender adoration. In short, it was a library to idolize, and Copeland idolized it with the inbred devotion of a priest the third in line, sacrificing to it, as had his father and grandfather, with their self-effacing wives as altar servers, all the resources of his dwindling income, save enough to maintain the family decorums, fingering as a breviary the red-bound manuscript catalogue in which he and his father and his grandfather had recorded each new accession. And like most priests, he held those not worshipers at his shrine as belonging in outer darkness.

For such idolatry the Nemesis that follows upon all extremes is sure but usually slow, except when some other idol reveals itself to contest the shrine.

In Copeland's case the idol did reveal itself when he was thirty-three, and according to Newtown's usages settled into celibacy; and because his excess had been of the finer sort, the new idol was no other than Elizabeth Lloyd, the most spirited, the most seductive, the most sought after and bowed down to of all the girls in the township,— and the least bookish. That she was herself the stuff that books are made of was argued by members of the Elizabeth Lloyd cult when confronted with legends of her early revolt against not only the speller, and geography, and reader, but even the potential books existing in ink and paper.

And indeed, aside from the obvious contradictory charm of sea-blue eyes, an olive skin, and a figure youthful but marked by the carriage of queenhood, there was in the droop of her full, dark eyelids, in the enigmatic curve of her lips in repose, a suggestion of being more than she seemed, that even unimaginative men would interpret to fit their ideals.

Perhaps it was because of this unknown quality in the girl's make-up that Copeland persuaded himself in the face of all forewarnings — and simply her unsympathetic manner of holding a volume should have been sufficient — that, having all other things, this love of books would be added unto her. Perhaps Elizabeth did not discourage the belief. Perhaps even, accustomed to an undivided kingdom, she dreamed of winning him from the worship of his ancestors. Or possibly she thought nothing at all except

of her love for him, for that she loved Horatio Copeland with that love which men of single mind and unworldly habit sometimes win from worldly women is beyond dispute. At any rate, at nineteen she settled down in the white house with the Greek portico. And for awhile all was happiness and content, and Elizabeth Copeland made believe that she preferred moth-eaten upholstery to mahogany and velvet, herbs to stalled ox, and — but here the connection does not hold — the devotion of the recluse to that of those driving, dancing, one-time would-be lovers of hers. That they had none of them passed the probationary stage indicates that she had balance as well as charm. But their admiration, backed by substantial offers of houses and horses, and the appropriate setting for her fascinations, had been a constant factor in her life since the day when she took her first waltz steps at the Newtown dancing school. And the need and habit of queenhood were in her blood, just as the need and worship of his books were in the blood of him who had promised to love and cherish her until death did them part. With such an inheritance it needed only the clarifying circumstances of every-day companionship to reveal to these people that they were not one, but two and two.

At this date — I write of sixty years ago — it is impossible to decide whether it was Mr. Copeland's refusal to accompany his wife to a dinner party in the next town, or her indifference to a rare quarto Shakespeare, bought at the price of a set of furniture, that was at the beginning of this revelation. Tradition also only hints at the fine details of its growth, — the gradual encroachment of Copeland's hours in the library upon those once given to his wife, the listlessness with which she listened to his unintelligible raptures over grubby commentaries, his blindness over the growing shabbiness of her trousseau, his maddening caresses, in her very presence, of the so-called insensate volumes that arrived weekly by post and express. Nor does it tell of that hour — which any one past twenty can imagine — when Mrs. Copeland, looking into her husband's eyes, saw there another image than her own.

For that reason it is hard to judge fairly of the conduct of these two people during the one episode of their married life that not merely tradition but contemporary records present in bold outline.

Stripping it of all superfluities of gossip and conjecture, the circumstance stands naked as follows: —

On the first anniversary of their marriage, it had been arranged, the Copelands were to open their house to all the young people of the township, and indeed of half the county, — an event for which went forward preparations unheard of in the history of the Copeland house, at least since it had enshrined the Copeland Collection. To tell, however, in detail of the gleam of silver candelabra, the sparkle of glass, the odors of pound cake and spiced meats, the fragrance of lavender-scented linen, would be to convey no impression of the elaborateness of the affair for sixty years ago.

It is enough to say that the occasion was to be one that should restore to Elizabeth Copeland the crown and scepter of her queenship, and in token thereof she was to assume the one gown in her trousseau that had not become shabby, —her wedding gown of watered white silk. And here again mere description would by no means convey the effect upon those simple people of that gracious figure in its shining raiment, or of the spirited pose of the head above the frosty white bodice, or of the "liquid shining of the eyes that answered the chastened luster of the string of pearls encircling the round throat."

But here I quote a private letter descriptive of the wedding. When Mrs. Copeland unpacked her gown on the morning of her anniversary, she found that the string of pearls, merely a clever imitation, was crushed and spoiled.

Whereupon, Horatio Copeland, with that instant alertness that occasion sometimes awakes in men not commonly accounted "of action," was out of the house posting away to Boston after a new string of pearls — real ones they were to be this time — before his wife had swept up the fragments.

It is safe to say that it was not merely the thought of a new ornament that parted Mrs. Copeland's lips in the smile noted by all who saw her during that day.

But there was no such smile on the lips that at seven that night welcomed the guests who streamed through the Greek portico into the drawing room opposite the library, — only the semblance of pleasure; while the head above the frosty white bodice assumed with each moment the more spirited pose of a wife who received

for herself and her absent husband. For Mr. Copeland still delayed.

"Detained to gratify a whim of hers," she explained to an old admirer, who straightway passed the word around. "Doubtless," she continued, "he would return by eight at the latest."

But at eight the lord of the manor was still absent, and at nine, and at ten, and still the glittering smile and the spirited head marked queenhood.

It was nearing eleven, and whispers were going about of an accident and a searching party, when there was a hum of wheels outside and a step on the porch. Then the door opened admitting the mud-splashed figure of the master of the house, who hesitated on the threshold, staring around for a second like one just awakened from a dream. In his hand he clutched a small oblong parcel.

For that instant the semblance of a smile melted, and the eyes under the full dark lids looked with no enigmatic expression into the eyes of her lord.

"You have taken all that trouble — gone sixty miles — to get my necklace," was all that she said. But there was that in her voice that more than one man present that night would have crossed the world to hear.

As she spoke, she had taken the parcel, and turning so that she faced the room, began to undo it.

And suddenly the man's face went gray.

"Don't, Elizabeth, I conjure you, do not open it — now," he said hoarsely. "I was beside myself — it was so rare an example — I followed one man all over the city before I found it — "

His voice died away in a husky laugh as she shook aside the paper and held out almost at arm's length a small, shabby calf-bound volume of Shakespeare.

For at least five moments she stood there silent, the frosty white folds of her wedding gown gleaming in the candle-light, her smile glittering, her eyes shining like a pool on which had formed a sudden glaze of ice.

Then — but concerning what followed opinion seems to be divided. Some say that she deliberately threw the book into the fireplace, others that she simply let it fall, and that it was by ac-

cident it reached the flames. At any rate, before the calf-bound volume was consumed — with the sickening odor of a burnt offering of flesh — the rooms were emptied, save of Mrs. Copeland and her husband.

But the words that reached the ears of those still within hearing were not to be mistaken. In plain terms the woman declared that for the Copeland Collection she had gone shabby, fared poorly, lived lonely — without a murmur — until this. Now the time had come when her husband could make his choice ; it was a divorce either from his library or from his wife.

As for her, she said, she wished that she might never see a book again.

Oh, it was all very melodramatic, no doubt (as life will be at times in spite of the realist), and hardly less so that hour on the day following when great wagons drove up to the Greek portico, and the books of the Copeland Collection, gathered up in armfuls like so many cords of wood, were dumped into the wagons and jolted away.

As for the scene at the Boston salesroom when the Collection was auctioned off at half its value, with Horatio Copeland standing by, a spectator said that it reminded him of the sale at the block of a bankrupt planter's slave children.

But the really subtle working out of the Nemesis was not a matter of scenes or episodes.

Indeed, at first it seemed — to lookers-on — that the affair at the anniversary party had cleared the air, and was in the way of bringing the couple into closer accord than ever before. For all at once the one-time scholar and recluse bloomed into a veritable gallant, squiring his wife everywhere, going out of the township, even the county, to escort her to card parties, and assemblies, and suppers, at which Elizabeth Copeland was always easily dominant, in gowns of such fantastic foreign make as emphasized that already noted enigmatic quality of her beauty. He also insisted upon opening his house — newly done over with much gilding, and rose satin, and dangling crystal, as was the fashion of great houses in those days — to half the county, entertaining at dinners and dances whose viands, and wine, and music were to Newtown what Lucullus's feasts were to ancient Rome.

And even in the privacy of his home, on the rare occasions when husband and wife were alone, it was reported that Elizabeth Copeland never appeared save in a new gown of silk, or lace, or flowered Indian muslin, that she never sat at a table not laid and served as for a banquet, that she never saw the day that did not bring her some present in the way of finery or furnishing.

It was as though the Copeland Collection had been converted into a horn of plenty, from which fell into her hands every material gift save one.

Into that house there came no more a book, or a magazine, or so much as a scrap of printed paper. Even the letters with the foreign postmarks accumulated unopened in great heaps on desks, and table, and floors. And if, night after night, the husband stole down into the dismantled library and sat gazing for hours by the light of the candle at the blank shelves that stared at him like empty eyesockets, or fingering the manuscript catalogue that had been as a breviary to three generations of Copelands, — thinking, thinking till dawn crept over the New England hills, the fact was guessed only by one other, and spoken of never by her.

What Elizabeth Copeland had asked with her lips she had received in measure heaped and running over.

But by the observant it was noted that the glaze as of ice on her eyes never melted.

And by and by the Newtownians began to wonder whether this topsy-turvy state of things could last. Indeed, to no man is it permitted to run counter to nature for long. One day in the sixth month of his dancing, riding, dinner-giving metamorphosis Horatio Copeland contracted a heavy chill, — on a twenty-mile sleigh ride and supper party, — and after lying two days in a fever, died without regaining consciousness.

One year and six months from her wedding day Mrs. Copeland was a widow, and, for those times, an heiress, inheriting all her husband's estate in a will that by an irony of early date made a special bequest of the Copeland Collection to his "beloved wife Elizabeth." At the time the circumstance called forth no comment from Newtownians, save on the opportuneness of the sale that left her in possession of a comfortable sum of ready money. And then Newtown turned its attention to other things,—the anti-slavery

"fanatics," for instance, and the clever sketches just appearing by a promising young humorous writer named Dickens,— and waited for the year of mourning that must elapse before the rose and gilt drawing room, the prism-hung chandeliers, the fantastically appropriate foreign gowns, should be in evidence again.

But to the township of Newtown the sight not only of these wonders, but of the spirited head and the gracious figure that they had so "set off," was never again vouchsafed.

For instead of the Elizabeth Copeland they had known there stole out into the dusk of the evening, or in the pallor of early morning, a mere gray shadow of a woman, absent, aged, preoccupied, her eyes ever cast down in the unseeing look of the recluse. In place of the rustling silks and flowered muslins, they saw her figure swathed in shapeless folds of limp black cashmere; in place of buckled shoes, they saw her slender foot disguised in rude heavy shoes; instead of mantillas of lace, heavy worsted shawls; instead of flower-trimmed hats, the coarse straw bonnet of middle age. And through the single servant — for never again did visitor penetrate to that house — there trickled out tales of lace-trimmed lingerie replaced by the coarsest unbleached cotton, of famine fare eaten from dishes of earthenware, of evenings spent in the dark to save candles, of hours passed locked in the empty library.

Greatest marvel of all, it was told — to incredulous ears — that she who had always preferred an oar or a needle to pen or book had been metamorphosed into a veritable student, always reading, reading, reading, evening and morning, letters, and magazines, and books that came weekly by post and express.

Finally even that servant was dismissed, and only the grocer who brought her meager little provisions could tell of the rough red hands, once so soft and white, of the one-time lithe figure bent as from stooping over rude work and long tasks.

And gradually Newtown came to regard the comings and goings of the detached figure as one of the unalterable facts of life, no more to be questioned than the orbit of the planets, and to attribute to some unexplained law of nature her occasional departures to places they knew not of, on errands of which they could form no conjecture.

Twice in the passing of years, when the house was shuttered and the door barred, and the grocer dismissed for nearly a twelvemonth, it was rumored that she had gone to strange countries across the sea. But as the years of her widowhood grew to forty, and factories and workingmen's cottages sprang up in one-time gardens and meadows, and the soot from tall chimneys blackened the white pillars of the Greek portico, a generation arose that knew nothing of Elizabeth Copeland.

That was why, when the mortgagee drove up to the door one raw March day, and pulled the bell, and pounded on the windows, and scraped the paint in flakes from the back door with his patent leather shoes, there was no one to tell him of the big vans that three times within the half year had driven empty up the elm-hung driveway and gone out loaded; of the shadowy figure that at dusk stole out of the side door and down to the squalid business street, concealing under her shawl curious, many-cornered, bulging bundles that she never brought back again. Nor was there any one to tell him that for three days now no one had come from the house or gone to it, and that not the thinnest film of smoke had issued from the chimney.

"Gone abroad for good, I suppose," said the mortgagee, with a slight accent of mockery, when he had finally summoned the old locksmith who knew the house, and by his aid forced an entrance.

And, indeed, the absolute bareness of the house bore him out. For in all the place there was not so much as a stick of furniture, nor a dish, nor a gown, nor anything save a few worthless ornaments and some heaps of empty envelopes.

Upstairs and downstairs and through all the musty, echoing chambers the mortgagee paraded, followed by the locksmith, until they paused for the second time before the locked door of the library.

"Queer," murmured the man who knew the house, as he worked on the lock; "queer that she should have kept the key to this. Why, you know — "

And then, as with a groan of complaint the door suddenly swung back, he stepped aside to give passage to his companion. But with his first step across the threshold the mortgagee came to a stammering halt, looking somehow shrunken and abashed. Then with a movement of reverence both men bared their heads.

For on the uncarpeted floor, the limp folds of her black cashmere dress arrayed in decorous lines, her rough, misshapen hands clasped upon a certain much-worn manuscript catalogue, like a priest's upon a breviary, her face, yellow and creased as a sheet of crumpled parchment, fixed in a smile, — as though at the last sight of things unspeakably dear, — lay Elizabeth Copeland. And all about her and around her, filling the shelves that lined the four walls, piled on the window sills, overflowing even to the floor, were books of every size, shape, and age, but all bearing the name of Shakespeare.

"It's the Copeland Collection!" whispered the locksmith when his tongue was finally unloosed.

And such indeed it was, so far as one woman, unlettered, unfriended, never wealthy, finally impoverished, could summon it back from the bourne of missing volumes. What was the compelling motive, whether remorse or mania, or the ironic bequest of her husband's will, or some subtile inheritance by which, say married folk, not merely material possessions but even tastes and habits of the dead are sometimes transmitted to the surviving wife or husband,— or whether some unguessed force differing from all of these, must always remain a subject for speculation.

But this much is a matter of history — that from Boston second-hand shops, and bookstalls on the quays of Paris, from country parsonages, and over sea "great house" libraries, from England and from India, and mystic Japan even, from all the marts where libraries are made and unmade by laws immutable as those governing atomic combination, she had summoned back the far-wandering volumes. And to-day, though broken and incomplete, like some family reunited after years of separation, the Copeland Collection lived again.

In an alcove of the library at Newtown — an alcove bearing Horatio Copeland's name — it lives still, the sole bequest of a woman who left beside only the money for the humblest burial in the grave with her husband.

And there are those who, knowing the Collection intimately, and visiting it day after day, say that it speaks to them not only of the past, but of the future, — of that other side of Nemesis by which any extreme of sorrow finds extreme compensation.

But this narrative deals with facts, not speculation.